

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it is not even just the taxes either, which I think the tax rate and the amount people are paying now has significantly increased, but I think it is important also to talk about the health care issue that I think went up about 50 percent since President Bush got in office, with no real plan.

We hear a lot about health care savings accounts. Those are great if they have enough money to put in them every month. If they have a little disposable income, they start a health care savings account. But a lot of people are living paycheck to paycheck. They do not the money to put into a health care savings account.

□ 2230

The issue we need to address is health care costs with information technology and preventative care and stop using the emergency rooms as clinics, because they are not; and it is the most inefficient way to run the kind of health care system that we are running here. Again, another major issue that is swing and a miss.

Swing and a miss on the economy; swing and a miss on health care; swing and a miss on making the proper investments in education, at least the funding side of things. I agree, it was great to see the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) and Ted Kennedy with President Bush saying this is the way to move forward with education. But if the money and resources are not there, things become problematic.

So the bottom line is, and I think what we are trying to say here, as we wrap it up, we have got a lot of issues, but we need to focus on some of these core issues, about the economy, investments to make sure that we are producing enough engineers and computer scientists to compete with these other countries who are focusing on those kind of issues, having a national program.

I think the space program and going to the Moon was a lot more about getting people educated and into corporate America and into our universities than it was actually putting somebody on the Moon. That was the goal. But we need something like that. We need something, some national goal that is going to set and coordinate our efforts here, to inspire young children to study math, to study science, to become engineers and contribute to the economy. We have to generate a lot of wealth.

We are going to be losing a lot of wealth because of the outsourcing. These jobs are moving to China and India, they are moving to Ireland, they are moving to these other countries; and if we are going to keep our status as a tier-one economy so that we can have a tier-one military, we have to make these investments. You do not hear that word "investment" used much around here anymore.

Just drop us e-mail. It will be interesting to hear what people who are out there watching think that the priorities should be here in the United States Congress: 30something democrats@mail.house.gov.

I thank the gentleman for allowing me to join him here tonight and be part of this great debate. I thank him for his leadership on the Committee on Homeland Security. I know that, unfortunately, it is going to be a focus more and more for our country and this Congress. I thank the gentleman for his leadership.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I want to thank the gentleman for pointing out not only the importance of future generations, but also we talked about tonight the issue of relationships versus what we are sent up here to do.

This issue of homeland security, the gentleman knows we are working on a piece of legislation as it relates to disclosure to the American people. I think that is important also as it relates to some financial issues.

But we appreciate the gentleman's representation of his fine district in Ohio. We hope that we can work in a bipartisan way on many pieces of legislation.

The whole issue as it relates to private accounts, the name "private accounts" lets us know on this side of the aisle that the majority side has already decided on what it is going to be. We know what private accounts are going to bring. We have to continue to fight.

That is why we come to the floor, not only to talk about the difference, but to talk about the will to lead in the areas we need to lead.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank not only the Democratic leader, the gentleman from California (Ms. PELOSI), but the leadership, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and all the way to our Democratic Caucus, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and also the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN) and others for allowing us to come to the floor one more time.

THE CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, this evening several of my colleagues and I are going to discuss a topic which is a little bit different from what normally is discussed here on the House floor. I think the general impression that one would get in watching the debate and some of the Special Orders is that this is a highly partisan, very divided body, and somewhat a Godless body at times. I do not believe that this is the whole story.

One activity in the House that is not partisan or contentious is the weekly

prayer breakfast that is held every Thursday morning. There are roughly 30 to 40 Republicans and Democrats who meet during that hour. It is completely nonpartisan. It is Members only. It is confidential. Whatever it is said there stays there. Of course, it is the precursor to the national prayer breakfast which is held every spring.

Just a word or two of historical background. I think it is important that we from time to time recall that we are a spiritual Nation and that our foundation is of a spiritual nature.

To quote Benjamin Franklin, who many believe was somewhat irreligious, this is what he said in a speech on the House floor: "We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that except the Lord build a house they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that without his concurring aid, we shall succeed in the political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests, our projects will be confounded and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword down to future ages."

Then he goes on to say: "I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business."

Of course, that speech was the precursor of the morning prayer that we have every day that we meet in Congress. So Franklin was alluding to the fact that without acknowledging the divine presence and without prayer, that many of the deliberations of this body were of no more worth than the builders of Babel.

George Washington, of course, was a Founding Father that also was one who relied heavily upon his faith. This is what he said in his inaugural address. He said: "The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which heaven itself has ordained."

Both Benjamin Franklin and George Washington indicated that the foundation of a successful nation really needed to be based upon spiritual principle.

Mr. Speaker, our purpose here tonight is to talk a little bit about the prayer breakfast, what we think the benefit of the prayer breakfast is. It is not to proselytize, it is not necessarily to even express our personal faith, but to let people know that there is an organization, there is a group here that meets regularly that is certainly not contentious and is focused upon spiritual issues.

I would just like to say one word about my personal experience at the prayer breakfast that has been very beneficial, and that is that I began to see people as they really are. We all have a facade. We bear titles. We are Republicans, we are Democrats, we are chairmen, we are vice chairmen, and

we are from different parts of the country. As we speak on the floor, many times we are somewhat contentious. At the prayer breakfast, all of those titles and all of those masks that we wear tend to be stripped away, and you begin to see a person as he or she really is.

I remember particularly one morning where a Member was to speak. I was not looking forward particularly to that particular day, because the image that I had of that individual was that of a person who was highly partisan, someone who had no relationship to anything that I believed. And yet as I listened to that person and I began to feel the pain in that person's life and I began to understand him better, I saw him entirely different. As a result, that person has become a very close friend, even though politically we are a long ways apart. I think many people have experienced that as well.

At this point, I am going to yield to a number of individuals who attend the breakfast who want to just give those who would be viewing a snapshot of how they feel about this particular organization and the service that it renders to this body.

The first person I believe who was here this evening was the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY), so I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) at this time.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, it is one of the best times of the week for me to reflect on why I am here, what is my purpose in being a Member of this body; why did I leave my prior profession, that of a physician, an OB/GYN doctor for 26 years, and in the comforts of my own hometown and all my patients, and all of a sudden embark on another career. I have to believe that I was sent here by the grace of God. I think that my fellow Members on both sides of the aisle must have that same feeling.

But it is the coming together once a week at the prayer breakfast that the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) just described that reminds us of that purpose, and reminds us, each Member, why we are here.

Just listening tonight, this evening, Mr. Speaker, from both sides of the aisle, you will hear a lot of times a discussion that sounds so highly partisan, you would think that we literally hated each other. Some Members are a little more strident, Mr. Speaker, than others, but it is not hatred; and I think it is important for us always to remember why this type of dialogue goes back and forth.

Both sides want to be in control. In this body and the other body, there is no sharing of this power and everybody wants to be in those leadership positions. Sometimes the dialogue gets pretty strident, and you literally would think, Mr. Speaker, those of us sitting as we come as new Members listening to the discussion from the other side

and them us, that we literally hate each other.

Truly, we do not, and to have an opportunity to come, as I say, and as the gentleman from Nebraska explains about the prayer breakfast, you get to know your colleagues in a different way. You know that they have parents and grandparents and husbands and wives and they have brothers and sisters and moms and dads, and they love the Lord, and they talk about it.

Some are more eloquent than others. I know I have to admit that I have not yet been the speaker, to talk about my life and why I am here and what purpose I hope to serve in this great body. I probably should not have admitted that, because the coach may have me down next week to give my testimonial, Mr. Speaker; and I may be more nervous during that than I am here participating in this Special Order tonight.

But I love my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Thursday morning at that prayer breakfast, that devotional, it gives me an opportunity to really understand why I am here, why we all are here: to do good, just to do good, to do the right thing, not to ever let political expediency get in the way of our principles, and always try to do God's will.

So for me to share a few moments talking about that tonight is a great pleasure, and I appreciate the gentleman from Nebraska bringing us together in a bipartisan fashion. You are going to hear from Members on both sides of the aisle; and because of our participation in that group, that Thursday morning prayer breakfast, they are my good friends and I am their good friend, and we respect one another and we love one another and we are going to continue to try, Mr. Speaker, to always do God's will.

□ 2245

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to recognize the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. Fox).

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity very much. I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for coming up with the idea of our doing this.

I think there are a lot of misconceptions about Congress. People think from the media, and I am not sure from where else, that we are a bunch of people who go out at night with lobbyists and carry on, and a lot of people do not have an idea that we do have this prayer breakfast every Thursday morning. I think that it is very important that we share as broad a perspective on what we do here in Congress as we possibly can.

There are 435 Members in the House of Representatives, and I think one of the best things that our prayer breakfast does is give us a chance to get to know people that we would not have an opportunity to get to know otherwise. As we have all pointed out, and others will too, it is bipartisan, and that is

one of the better parts of the breakfast. Because most of the time, we do meet by party and talk with people by party, and it is very difficult to get to know people of the other party unless you are serving with them on a committee. But this gives us an opportunity, as my colleague said earlier, to get to know people in a way that we would not get to know them otherwise.

It is a very structured meeting that we have in many ways. We are blessed that we have scripture reading brought to us by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CLEAVER) who does a wonderful job every week. I will have to say that many of us think when we go to church and hear a sermon, if it is a good sermon, the preacher is preaching right at us; and I think that I have been amazed at our scripture reading and the message that he brings every week. It seems always to hit the spot for me. So I am very grateful for that. We do a lot of praying and we do a lot of music. We sing. And we have been very blessed to have had the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. AKIN) lead our music this time, and it has been some of the most vigorous music that I have had a chance to participate in. I am very, very grateful for that.

As the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) said earlier, our Founding Fathers turned to God in prayer at the most difficult times of the founding of this Nation. And they did set a pattern for us, a pattern that I am pleased that we are continuing here by every day opening this session with a prayer but, again, encouraging us to get together to pray.

In addition to our having scripture and prayer and music, we also have someone who reminds us of the sick and wounded. When I thought about speaking tonight, I realized that is basically the only place where we are gathered together where we take the time to remember those amongst us who are having problems. I want to say I am very grateful for the group. My husband recently had surgery and our group prayed for him very vigorously, and I think those prayers meant a lot in terms of God bringing him through that in a very successful way.

We need our prayer breakfast. Those of us who go there need it. We call it the best hour of the week. It provides a grounding for us. It helps us remember what is important about life. We are here to do important work.

I remember once when I was in the legislature, somebody said to a group of us that we were important people; and one of the Members said, no, we are not important people; we are just ordinary people doing important work. And I think by going to our prayer breakfast on a regular basis, we understand we are not important people, but we are ordinary people doing important work and doing it with the values and the morals that I think that the people of this country expect us to have.

I am very grateful for those who have kept the prayer breakfast going over

the years and made it possible for those of us who are there now. I hope that our sharing tonight a little bit about our prayer breakfast will help break some of the misconceptions that people might have about us and give a broader viewpoint about how we spend our days in Congress and what we focus on.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Coach OSBORNE) for organizing this Special Order, and I thank the gentleman for the leadership that he provides to us at the prayer breakfast.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments. At this time I would like to yield to the cochair of the prayer breakfast, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for having the foresight to bring a group of us together here this evening on the House floor to talk about something that is an event that happens each Thursday morning, not something, but an event that happens each Thursday morning that I think helps mold us to realize that all of us have deep, abiding faith, regardless of which political party we claim to be of.

We keep saying that Thursday morning is the best, it is the best hour of the week. Well, there is no question that is the case. But for me it gives me an opportunity; most of us in our districts, I have 10,000 square miles, and Tennessee is 40,000 square miles, and in my congressional district, you probably would not find any more God-fearing people, God-loving people than in the district I represent. Now, I know each of you will challenge that, I am sure. But I know the folks that I represent, and my colleagues know the people that they represent. But the people I represent are very rural people, they are close to nature, and worship is important to them.

From time to time, Sunday mornings, never Wednesday nights can I go to prayer meetings anymore, but on Sunday mornings sometimes we have schedules that prevent us from being at our own home church. I am Southern Baptist. So Thursday morning has become the day that I look to as kind of my church day. It is the day that I know that I will get together with people here in Congress, 435 of us, I wish all of us came, that I could get with individuals and we share our faith, without knowing which party that we are a member of.

I go back to my youth when I was growing up, and I think when you start looking especially in the rural areas, the gentleman from Nebraska represents a huge area of Nebraska, and I am sure he probably has small communities that have less than 20 to 30 people, but there is a church there, is there not? There is a house of faith that is built there.

So when our early settlers first came to this country, a family or two would locate, and one of the first buildings

they would build other than their home was a house where they could worship, a house of worship. Oftentimes it was used also to educate the young children. That has always been the nucleus that has held that community together.

So I think our prayer breakfast basically gives me that same magnetic feeling of being among those who share a faith. We have had different faiths who speak, and I have been impressed with each one of them. I have been surprised, in many cases, by each of them as they talk about how they grew up and what their father and mother did and how their mother and father encouraged them and took them to church with them and encouraged them to develop a deep, abiding faith. I listen to those Members of Congress and I think, there is no partisanship there.

Sometimes, when we are looked upon by those outside of this Chamber, through the media, through some of the partisan efforts, quite frankly, probably in our different parties in our local communities, I am not sure they realize how close many of us are at those Thursday morning prayer breakfasts and how we pray for each other and for this country and for our soldiers that are in harm's way. And we pray for the wisdom to look to God's will as we make the decisions here inside this Chamber.

I often get an opportunity to go down to the country stores. Some of my colleagues may not have the rural country stores where that also is kind of an area where if it is not Wednesday night or Sunday morning or Sunday evening, where people gather. I go to a little place called Forbus General Store. It has been in operation since 1887; it is over 100 years old and continues to operate.

Years ago, if you wanted medications, if you were sick, the doctor would write a prescription, or you would go to that store, and even though a fellow may or may not have been a pharmacist, he would give you a prescription. If you had lost a family member, you could buy a casket. If you had a team of mules, you could buy a harness. It is a huge facility that is still in operation.

Obviously, those particular items you do not purchase there any more, but one thing we will do. We will sit back in the back, and there is usually a table where you can sit and drink coffee, and I know the Republicans and I know the Democrats. I think all of them probably are for me; at least I hope they are. But as we talk about issues, there is never a time when it appears that we get angry at each other. There is always that, because we know each other, there is that camaraderieship amongst each other, and issues that come up that are important to them.

As a Congressman, the other day I was there; I tell this joke and I probably should not. But this one fellow, I

was carrying on a pretty good conversation, and one of the boys in the back named Johnny Anderson reared back and he said, Lincoln, you are getting just like those fellows in Washington. I believe you are getting so winded you could blow up an onion sack.

So, in essence, they look at us sometimes differently in these small rural areas; and maybe in the urban areas it is the same way. But what I hope, after our presentations tonight, that Americans will realize that as a group of men and women collectively, men and women of faith, that our faith does mean something to us; that in most cases, I truly believe all of us make a faith-based decision on the issues that come before this House. I know I do. And I think all of the Members do.

So it has been a delight for me to work with the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE). He is of a different political party than me. As a matter of fact, Tennessee Vols learned to have a greater respect for the gentleman from Nebraska (Coach OSBORNE) when he was a coach in Nebraska. So, in essence, I have learned a greater respect for him as well, for the man, for the man of faith that I know him to be, and for a spiritual leader that many of us can look to for spiritual guidance.

So to me, on Thursday mornings, bringing together folks who seem to be so different in the eyes of the American public, if they were only here, would realize that there is at least one place that bipartisanship thoroughly survives and is loved among those of us who go on Thursday morning to a prayer breakfast. In February we have the Congressional Day of Prayer, and it is attended by many people from different nations. And at that prayer breakfast, I think we have been able to probably minister and reach out to individuals of different faiths and some even to help establish a faith in them and perhaps in their country.

So I look forward to working with the gentleman for the rest of the year and continue as long as I am in Congress to share with men and women of faith on the special hour each Thursday morning.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much, and I certainly appreciate his leadership at the prayer breakfast. I was hoping we would get through this hour without talking about football, but it did come up and, fortunately, we do not get too involved with that and it keeps things on a little higher plane. So at this point, I would like to recognize a gentleman who has really added a lot to the prayer breakfast through the fact that he plays guitar and can carry a tune and usually gets us started on the right note, and that is the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. AKIN).

Mr. AKIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska. I think some people might be surprised that there is a prayer breakfast like this

down here and that people get along very well and encourage each other, pray for each other and really have a time of sharing, but also it is very special to me, because when you are in Congress, everybody here is so busy all the time. And this is a time where you can actually set aside a little bit of time in the morning, and you can get to know somebody new in a special kind of way.

But this thing should not really surprise us all that much. If we go back to the beginning of our country, this is a country that just has been loaded up on faith right from the beginning. The Pilgrims came here and the very first Constitution they wrote says "in ye name of God, amen" it starts out. In 1620, 1630, the Puritans arrive and coming down the coast, they say, we believe that God has confirmed His covenant by bringing us safely to this country, and that we shall be as a city on a hill, a light to all people, if we deal faithfully with our God.

□ 2300

You can spin forward another 150 years to the time when they are framing, trying to put the constitution together. You have got old Ben Franklin there, 84 years old, and everybody is arguing, these politicians making long winded speeches, it is hot, there is no screens on the windows, everybody's patience is a little bit short. And old Ben Franklin gets up and look over his old bifocals and he is speaking to George Washington now at the time. He says, we have been assured, sir, in the sacred writing of scripture that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the notice of God. Is it probable that a Nation can rise without his blessing? And he goes on to say that we really need to start with prayer as we start looking at putting this new constitution together.

And then you get this building built, a certain number of years later, the great big old Capitol dome right next to us here this evening. It was for I guess about 80 or 90 years, the biggest church in Washington, D.C. because on Sunday that is where they held services. So we stand in a long tradition. And that tradition is continuing to go on in this wonderful time that we have Thursday mornings to just let each other pray for each other. And then usually the way it works is somebody stands up for about a half an hour and just shares about what their life is about. And you know there are so many wonderful people that have been elected down here, and they all have such unique stories and every one of them is a picture of the side of America. And those of us that take the time to go really get to love it. It is almost sort of like a living Norman Rockwell picture when people share their lives, and it is such a treat to be able to do it.

And the one thing there is a little bit of lack of talent in the music department so they called on me. I used to

get kicked out of choir all the time, so they did not know that when they asked me to do it. But we do manage to sing through a few songs and have a little bit of fun in the process.

But I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for his leadership and just taking a little bit of moment tonight so we could share with everybody who is interested what a wonderful time that is Thursday morning at 8 o'clock.

Mr. OSBORNE. Well, I certainly thank the gentleman and we really have appreciated the music that he has brought to the prayer breakfast.

And at this time I would like to recognize the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE), who also has been very faithful in his attendance and adds a lot to the Thursday morning activities.

Mr. PEARCE. I thank the gentleman for verifying that. My pastor at home would be deeply interested to understand that I do attend prayer breakfast every week or almost every week. And I thank the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS) for his leadership in that group.

You know, when I travel at home, people, the most common comment that people make to me, first of all, is tell the President we are praying for him. And that is often repeated, even into this last weekend when I was at home.

The second thing that people ask, and they are almost surprised to find out, is there are not many Christians in Congress. And they are surprised to find out that not only are there many Christians, but that we actually gather in a bipartisan basis once a week and have this prayer breakfast.

And I think it is essentially one of the strongest components of our Nation that we still recognize the founding of this Nation on the Christian principles. It was our Founding Fathers who declared that a democracy demands a moral people. They understood that a democracy does not use the force of strength on its people to cause them to follow the law; that instead it depends on a voluntary compliance, and that volunteer compliance depends on having a moral fiber and a moral instruction.

Now we go to schools to understand knowledge and wisdom. But I think that our religious education, our moral education helps us to understand how to live correctly and rightly, how best to order our lives, that we do not impair the freedom of others, and yet we access the blessings that are given to us. And what better opportunity for us to explore that than to come together in a bipartisan way to pray for those things that a Nation should be praying for, for wisdom for its leaders, for steadfastness that we would keep to the same course, that we would not vary back and forth, for clarity, that as we deal with difficult subjects, that we can understand and discern correctly between the competing value systems that we are confronting.

What better prayer group could we have than to ask for the blessings of

God on to this Nation. And I think as we do that in a bipartisan way each week, it softens up the tendency to for us to see the differences between the two parties and the two different philosophical sets and we begin to see the commonalities that are approached from different directions. And that, for me, gives the real strength to this country because the strength of a country is not one single set of ideas but a single set of values that are approached from different directions, and the dramatic tension that plays back and forth between competing philosophical sets is what gives us the strength.

Commonly we think of the strength of trees and pine trees that grow up in New Mexico without winds that blew from more than one direction have one kind of strength. But the people who know lumber say that in Washington State where the winds blow from all directions and the cellular structure in the tree is moving back and forth creates a strength that the pine trees in our state do not have. And I think that we as a Nation must understand that as we toss ideas back and forth that is a strengthening process as long as we keep it civil. And I say to the gentleman from Nebraska and the gentleman from Tennessee, for me, you all lead that prayer breakfast in an excellent fashion to help us get that tension back and forth in a reasonable, and a calm and spiritual way. So for me the prayer breakfast serves a very compelling reminder that God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways as our colleague had mentioned elsewhere.

Finally, the thing that the prayer breakfast does for me is it offers accountability. The lifestyle of a congressional representative with the travel back and forth is extremely disorienting, and that accountability to members of the same faith who are declaring similar values is a very important part of me coming here and remembering who I am and where I am from and what my commitments are too.

So again, I thank all of the people in this Congress who participate in the prayer breakfast and who reach out hands of encouragement and accountability each week. So I thank the gentleman from Nebraska again for his leadership in this.

Mr. OSBORNE. I thank the gentleman from New Mexico. We appreciate the gentleman's faithfulness.

Madam Speaker, at this time I would like to yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP). The gentleman has been a long time faithful member of the Thursday morning prayer breakfast. Currently the gentleman does the accountability in terms of those people who are hurting, those people who are injured, those people who are ill, and we really appreciate that part of his service here. And I think the gentleman has a genuine ministry here within Congress. And so it is my pleasure to yield time to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP).

Mr. WAMP. Madam Speaker, I am so grateful the gentleman from Nebraska has done this. I can feel the sweet spirit in this room that we feel every Thursday morning, that most people would really never have a chance to feel and many people come to this body with great success in their previous vocation. Few people come with greater success than the gentleman from Nebraska. Yet the gentleman is among the most humble, decent, selfless thoughtful people that I have ever seen and here the gentleman truly is salt and light in a place that needs that. It is the best hour of the week. It is what many of us look forward to each week. I find it very interesting that when Members leave this place, if they came to the prayer breakfast and people will say what do you miss the most, that is always the first thing that they say is I miss that prayer breakfast, or if there was some bipartisan activity they were engaged in, whether it was a trip, family activities or maybe in the gym to exercise, they miss that. They miss the bipartisan aspects of the House more than anything else. And I think that is important and instructive for us.

We should not be too surprised though that this is a time of great tension and political division. I can remember in the mid-90s, I was here, Speaker Gingrich was the Speaker. Many things that he said were almost a forewarning, almost prophetic. He said he thought we had entered into a period that may go 20 years of very close competition between the parties, and that political power may swing back and forth.

□ 2310

And since he said that, we had the Senate that changed hands without an election, just with one person switching parties. We had the closest election in the history of our country in 2000, and the country still ideologically is very divided. So you can see how people might engage in rancor or very divisive debate. That is why it is even more important for us to be active at trying to bring people together, trying to hold up the institution, the things that are good, and to talk openly about civility.

I think we talk about a whole lot of things that do not matter as much, and we do not talk near enough about things that do matter more, and that is what we are here tonight to talk about.

Senator Brock, who served in the House seat I am in, gave a speech in Tennessee last week about the lack of the civility in the public arena in this country today and how important that is. Dr. David Abshire, former ambassador, just wrote an essay called "The Grace and Power of Civility." The Grace and Power of Civility.

We need to claim that grace and that power. This weekly hour that we come to is truly salt and light in a place here; and the scripture calls us to be salt and light. This gives us an opportunity to be salt and light.

Let me say humbly as a member of the majority party that it is imperative if we are going to have civility and we are going to have any unity, unity is a powerful force in a family, in a Congress, in the country. It is the goal that caused Abraham Lincoln to keep us together at our worst hour. He said, We are going to preserve our union. We are going to stay unified.

Unity is a powerful principle. And humbly may I say, it is the responsibility of the majority to reach out in a civil way to try to work together to work together with the minority. It is a lot easier for the minority to get along with the majority than it is for the majority to take the initiative to try to find ways to be civil and decent and uphold the institution.

Now, there are so many wonderful stories of this hour; and as the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) said, what is said there stays there. But I want to give you just a little snapshot of a couple of the moments that have taken my breath away in the last 11 years.

We had the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) speak one day. The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) is a great leader of the civil rights movement. He almost went into fire and brimstone preaching that day, and it was powerful. But when he talked about the civil rights march going from Alabama to Mississippi and how he was met, that group was met at the Mississippi State line with the Adjutant General from the Mississippi National Guard having orders to arrest them as they entered the State of Mississippi. And that very general, General Sonny Montgomery of Mississippi, a member of Congress for over 30 years and for over 30 years the anchor of this weekly prayer breakfast, he was sitting in the room when John Lewis told the story, the very man that arrested them was in the room as a colleague, a Member of Congress. And the two of them that day, the love they have for each other years later is such an example of reconciliation and forgiveness. If they cannot only get along but find a way to love each other, surely, goodness, we can with the silly disagreements that we have from time to time.

I think of relationships that were forged. George Herbert Walker Bush when he was a Member of the House was a regular at this prayer breakfast and he became best friends, he was a Republican from New England, became best friends with a Democrat from Mississippi named Sonny Montgomery, and their friendship has lasted a lifetime, but it was forged on Thursday morning. It transcends everything that is done here. This is so meaningful.

I think of Charlie Stenholm, my friends for years. I think of Bob Stump, who is in heaven today, from Arizona who came for over 20 years every Thursday morning to pour coffee, walk around the room and serve his colleagues, faithfully coming early and staying late to clean up and serve others.

Someone chairs each week, as has been said. One of my favorite lines of any contemporary Christian song was written by Ray Boltz in a song that says, "When others see a shepherd boy, God sees a king."

Every Thursday somehow we all see a king or a queen because there is such goodness in every person that when they peel their heart back and show who they are, you can find something good. That is what we do not do enough around here is look for the good in the other person. When we do, this place gets a lot better; and I think a lot more will get done.

It has been said, but I want to say it this way, the vast majority of people in this body are good and decent people just trying their best to represent the folks back home to the best of their ability. But I want to close on this note. It takes maintenance to stay informed. It takes maintenance to stay fit of mind, body, and spirit. It does not just happen. It takes maintenance to be civil and decent and thoughtful and kind. You cannot just flip a switch and go from being a crass and cold and egotistical person to being good and decent and thoughtful to the other person. It takes maintenance.

That is one thing that we are here tonight to promote and say in a bipartisan way. We want this place to function as best it can. Before they introduce any of us, not just now but for the rest of their lives, they use one word in front of our name and that word is "honorable." They will say "honorable" for the rest of our lives. And I would say that if every one of us wants to live up to that call, we should think long and hard about how honorable we act towards each other while we are here. Because when it is all said and done, we are all just children of God called for two purposes: to serve him and to serve each other.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much. The gentleman certainly, as you can tell from his comments, is a mainstay in one of the pillars of the prayer breakfast, and we really appreciate his leadership.

The last person I believe that I have here tonight to call on is the person who currently handles our scripture, the gentleman from Kansas City, Missouri (Mr. CLEAVER). He has been the mayor of Kansas City. He is also an ordained minister. And since the gentleman has joined our breakfast, I think that we have seen a heightened quality and a real contribution. We want to thank him for all that he has contributed. And we are pleased that he would join us at this late hour.

Mr. CLEAVER. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) has benefited all of us and perhaps even the Nation by arranging for us to discuss something that perhaps many men and women around the country did not know existed. And the only untrue statement tonight is, I think, the gentleman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) perhaps overstated our singing

ability. I do think that we have a couple of people with talent, but it certainly does not go past a couple. And I just wanted to get the record straight for purposes of history.

When I was elected to this body, this hallowed hall, I made a commitment to the people of my district, to my family and to my God that I would not come here to call people names, that I would not come here and disrespect my colleagues. I might disagree, but I would never disrespect.

I did not realize that there was a prayer group here. The second week after I was sworn in, the gentlewoman from my State of Missouri invited me to the prayer breakfast. I came to the prayer breakfast with some uncertainty. I had no idea what it was about. I had no idea whether I would get anything from it. That quickly melted into the woodwork of that room where we meet.

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My commitment not to call names, my commitment not to be disrespectful is now empowered by the Hour of Power, the prayer breakfast. It is an opportunity for renewal for me to be with people who are like minded, men and women of faith.

There is a great deal of discussion taking place across the length and breadth of this Nation about the relevance of religion in politics. It is important for me to say that there is great relevance between faith and public service through elective office. If there is not relevance, then faith is frail. All of us are informed by our faith, albeit differently, because self-interest, unavoidably, creeps into our theology. So there are times when I am absolutely certain that I hear the voice of God, when in fact I may be hearing my own voice, disguised.

And so, because of that, in our prayer breakfasts there is no proselytizing. No one comes to the prayer breakfast to speak about legislation and the rightness or wrongness of it, or whether God has embraced it or whether God is against it. We come there in prayer. We come there as men and women looking for a moment. If we can just snatch this little moment where we can come into a setting where nobody is trying to do anybody any harm. It is a nonpolitical hour. You do not find Democrats standing up trying to present a donkey prayer. There are no elephant prayers. Men and women come to pray. So I am convinced that through that prayer breakfast we are able to build up our own personal faith so that it can inform us on how we conduct ourselves politically.

I realize that in this Congress there are no saints, just elected sinners who, for the most part, are trying to do the right thing and coming to the prayer breakfast reminds us that we are trying to do the right thing. Now, everybody here is fallible. We are flawed. We make mistakes. But I am convinced, at least based on what I have seen, that

everybody is here trying to do the right thing, and those of us who come to the prayer breakfast are working on it. We are not a complete product, but we are in fact working on it. We realize that working on our faith is a tortuously difficult and long process, but this helps.

I have family in Tanzania, Africa, in the City of Arusha, which sits in the shadows of Mount Kilimanjaro. When last there, I went to the Episcopal church, which is in downtown Arusha, such as it is, and I listened to a priest reprimand one of his parishioners. You see, in Tanzania, many of the people who live in huts build a little prayer spot somewhere near their door, usually a back door, and the priest can walk by and see whether there is a well-worn path from the door to the prayer spot. And I listened to a priest say to one of his parishioners, I saw much weeds growing in your prayer path, which meant that he had not been frequenting the place where he had established a relationship with God.

Without the prayer breakfast, I do not think that I would have the well-worn prayer path that I have now. For me, Thursday morning at 8 o'clock is the Hour of Power. There are people here who are in powerful positions, there are people here even now trying to become even more powerful in this Congress, but the real power, for me, the power that enables me to continue to function is the Hour of Power on Thursday mornings, and I thank God for it.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much. We appreciate all that he contributes each Thursday, and certainly his knowledge of scripture and his use of scripture has been something that has been an inspiration to all of us.

I would like to conclude this time, Mr. Speaker, by just making a few other observations and reflections. We want to make sure that people understand this is not an exclusive hour. We have many foreign dignitaries. These are all members of parliament, members of governments around the world. You have to be an elected member to attend. Some of them are Muslims, some are Jews.

We have had many of our Jewish Members in the Congress who have come and shared with us, and we want to have each person who comes to understand that they are cared for, that they are accepted, and that they are loved during that hour. So we find that by being inclusive in that way that we are able to share what we are put on this earth to do.

I would like to conclude by just reading a brief excerpt from a book by David Barton. Again, he was alluding to some of the Founding Fathers. And we know they had tremendous foresight and great anticipation of what was to come. "Franklin had warned," and Barton says this, "Franklin had warned 'forgetting God' and imagining

we no longer need his 'concurring aid' would result in international disputes, the decay of the nation's prestige and reputation, and a diminished national success. Washington had warned if religious principles were excluded, the nation's morality and political prosperity would suffer."

So these were some words from 200 years ago that I think resonate today. And certainly not necessarily as warnings but as indications that this Nation was founded on spiritual principle, and that forgetting those principles and moving away from them does have an inherent danger in it.

Reggie White is certainly much more contemporary. Reggie was a great defensive football player from the University of Tennessee and later played in the National Football League. Reggie said something that I thought was rather profound at one time. He said, "God honors those who honor him." I think Reggie was talking on a personal level, that certainly those individuals who honor God will in turn be honored, but I think Reggie also was referring to the fact that this is true at a national level, that those nations who honor him and remember him, and serve him and honor him will also be honored by God or divine providence, as Franklin and as Washington mentioned.

So it is worth mentioning and worth remembering at this time that this Nation is in a time of peril and a time of crisis and, therefore, we feel that the Thursday morning breakfast serves a useful purpose. And we hope that by having this hour this evening and having these Members come and share, that maybe the general public would get a little better understanding of what this assemblage is about and some of the things we think are important.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2601, FOREIGN RELATIONS AUTHORIZATION ACT, FISCAL YEARS 2006 AND 2007

Mr. BISHOP of Utah, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-175) on the resolution (H. Res. 365) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2601) to authorize appropriations for the Department of State for fiscal years 2006 and 2007, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. ETHERIDGE (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. HIGGINS (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. HINOJOSA (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and until July 21 on account of a district emergency.

Ms. MCKINNEY (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.